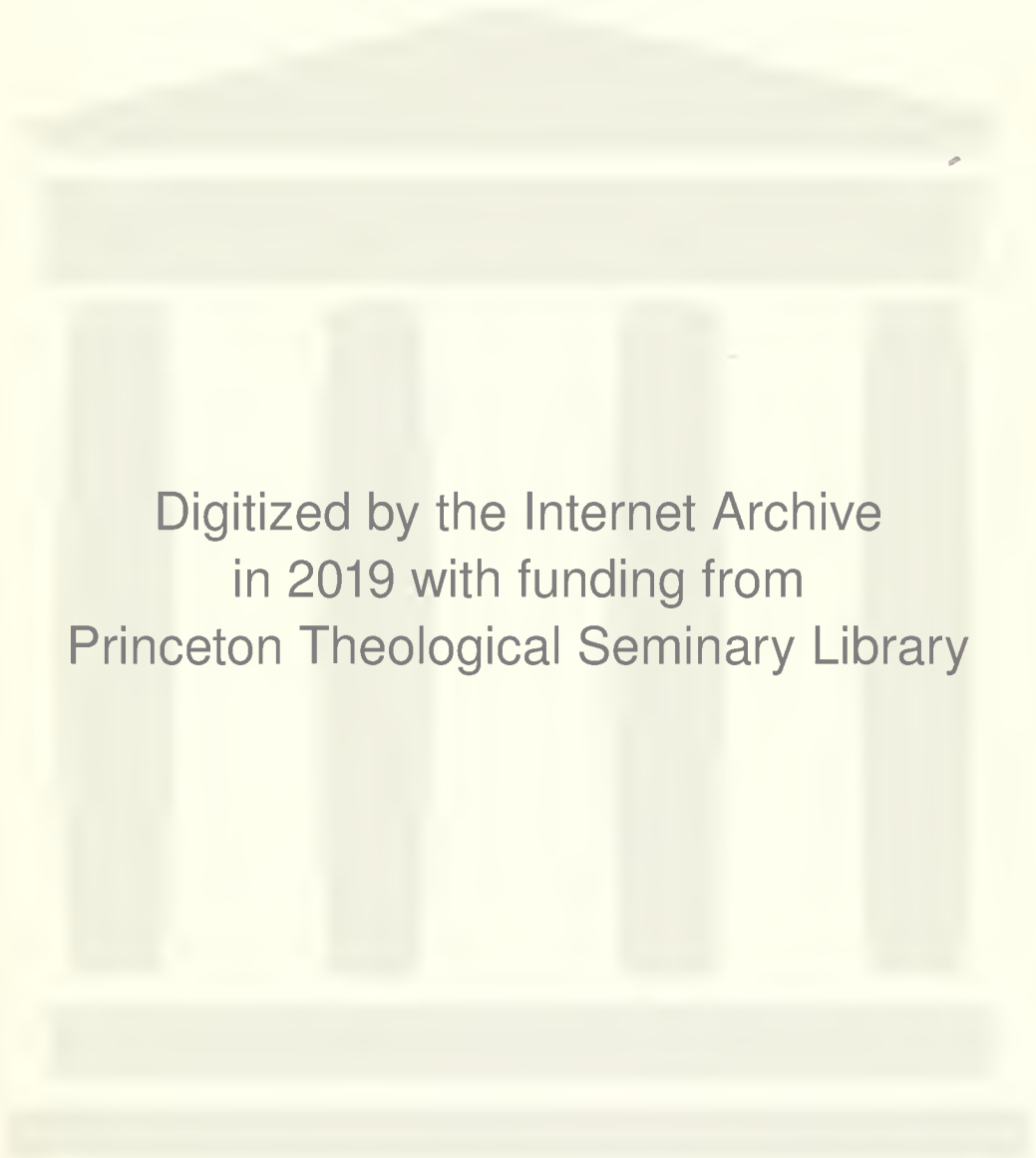
A PHILOSOPHY OF LIFE AND ITS SPIRITUAL VALUES

ALFRED W. MARTIN



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BY

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FOREWORD

This book may be described as a revised and much enlarged edition of the author's *What Human Life Is For,* which has been out of print for the past five years.

The reader is asked to remember that the author's views commit no one but himself. He speaks not *for* the Ethical Fellowship, but merely as a member *of* it, free to hold and express whatever philosophical or theological ideas commend themselves to him, provided only that he makes no one but himself sponsor for them.

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INTRODUCTION

To furnish an interpretation of life as a rational, ordered and consistent whole, to enthrone, as sovereign, an end to which all other ends must be subordinate, to point to an ultimate human destiny commensurate with that supreme and commanding end—these, I take it, are salient functions of philosophy applied to life. At any rate, without making the slightest pretense to an all-comprehensive definition of a philosophy of life, this statement of what it involves will suffice for the practical purposes of the present discussion. After all, every philosophy of life has for its immediate practical concern not the *terminus a quo* but the *terminus ad quem* of human aspiration and endeavor. In other words, its prime purpose is to find and put forth the true answer to that most vital of all questions—What is human

life for? And, in arriving at the answer, another of the crucial questions of life will be simultaneously answered—Is life worth living? For, according as the ultimate object of human desire and pursuit has worth or is worthless, so will life be, or not be, worth living. As is the ideal, that is, the mental picture of what it is supremely desirable that life should be, so will the life be. The picture may be noble or vulgar, exalted or debased, but what we thus look out upon from the window of the soul determines the character of our life.

Let us then consider some of the more important answers that have been given to this question that lies at the heart of every philosophy of life, and then, by a process of elimination, endeavor to arrive at the true answer.

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I

HAPPINESS

UNDOUBTEDLY the most popular of all answers is happiness; for the vast majority of men and women start out in life bent on achieving their own personal happiness. And by happiness they usually mean the gratification of immediate or prospective desire; the getting out of life all the various enjoyments it can yield, reaching out for the rich clusters of pleasure that hang on the vine of opportunity. And whatever the particular type of pleasure be to which these people look forward, it seems to be always in reach and therefore it is constantly pursued. What though, like Juno, in the ancient Greek myth,

this happiness turns out to be only a cold and clammy cloud in their embrace! What though three quarters of life has consisted of unhappiness, there still remains one quarter in which the pursuit may be renewed! Small wonder, then, that many go down to their graves fondly believing that if they had had one more chance, the happiness which so often escaped them would have been theirs.

But this is an altogether vain and pathetic delusion. For happiness is not an entity, not a substance, not something that can be kept under lock and key to be taken out at will. On the contrary, happiness always eludes its pursuer. Happiness is an exquisite surprise which comes to us when we have abandoned all thought of it. To get it we must forget it. No one has vindicated this truth more clearly or forcibly than Goethe, in his masterpieces—*Wilhelm Meister* and *Faust.* They take their place by the side of Homer's *Iliad,* Dante's *Divine Comedy,* the great plays of Shakespeare, Browning's *Ring and the Book.*

Why? Because, like these, Goethe's novel and drama have the quality of being inexhaustible. What is the test of a masterpiece? It is its power to grow with our growth, so that each time we come back to it with the key of our enlarged experience we unlock treasures not found there before. The best things in literature are those that reveal their meaning more and more the oftener we return to them, each time rewarding us, either with some new perception of truth, or some new appreciation of beauty, or perchance with both.

What is it that makes these two works of Goethe so absorbingly interesting and so stimulating ethically? It is the way in which they deal with this fundamental question—What is human life for? Goethe took a concrete human type, an ordinary, average young man and told the story of his experience, showing that, if happiness be what human life is for, then it will not do to pursue it deliberately and directly as the immediate object of our endeavor, because, if it comes

at all, it can be only as the surprise-sequel to some worth-while work in which we are engaged. To be gotten it must be forgotten. Goethe demonstrated, by means of these typical examples (Wilhelm Meister and Faust), that if the lustrous jewel, happiness, is to shine at all, it can be only in the golden setting of a life consecrated to some worthy end.

Wilhelm, you remember, started out in life as most young men are apt to start—as a thoroughgoing eudæmonist—that is, one bent on achieving his own individual happiness. He aims first of all at the gratification of his physical desires and by excessive indulgence reaps the inevitable result. Thoughtlessly, recklessly he sacrifices everybody and everything to the gratification of his selfish ends. But far from bringing him the desired happiness, he finds that his excesses have spun for him a web of difficulties and trials from which he extricates himself only by the most earnest effort. Sickness and disease lay hold on him and he is brought nigh to the point of death.

For it is Nature's immutable law that "whatsoever a man soweth that shall he also reap." Nor does Nature ever let us go unpunished if her laws are disobeyed. Taught by severe suffering the futility of seeking happiness on the physical plane, Wilhelm turns to that of the intellect and forthwith changes his former habits and associates. He will now have intellectual and æsthetic culture; culture of manners and of mind. But when he comes into contact with certain of the local *literati* and discovers how little mind he actually has—what a mere bourgeois he is among these literary aristocrats—he grows disheartened and discouraged and finds he is still as far off as ever from the happiness he pursues, albeit the pursuit of culture is nobler than that of gratifying the senses. But this higher pursuit has done one invaluable service for him. It has awakened an interest in his fellow men to such a degree that he takes up the study of medicine. And when, at length, he has entered the medical profession and is engaged

in its beneficent tasks; when he finds himself healing the sick, curing disease, alleviating pain, he tastes a contentment and satisfaction such as he never experienced before. In other words, when he has abandoned all thought of happiness and is busily engaged in work that is eminently worth while, happiness comes to him.

Some years ago in one of my ethics classes the pupils were asked to state the lesson taught by Goethe in this work. One of them replied, "We all should become doctors." So, indeed, it would seem, but the novelist used the practice of medicine simply as an example of worth-while work in consecrated devotion to which happiness comes as a surprise-sequel.

Turn we now to *Faust*. Here the selfsame message is brought home to us, only with still more cogency and clearness. No thoughtful reader of this drama can fail to see the place of happiness in Goethe's philosophy of life. Mephistopheles, you will remember, has made a contract with Faust, who, like Wilhelm, is

an average, ordinary, typical young man and a eudæmonist. The tempter promises him every conceivable form of delight, but on one condition, namely, that when the moment of supreme bliss shall have arrived—the moment in which he will exclaim, *"Verweile, du bist schön"* (Stay, thou art fair)—then he shall give his soul over to Mephistopheles forever. The contract is closed, the deal is on. Mephistopheles begins by beguiling the young man with every species of physical pleasure. But this, as in the case of Wilhelm, only brings retribution and remorse in its train. Faust pays the exact penalty in suffering and disease for every violation of Nature's laws. Then follows the awakening of Faust; his entrance into the affairs of statesmanship and intellectual pursuits, symbolized by the flight to Greece and conversations with the phantoms of Greek and Egyptian mythology.

Yet not even here, any more than in the former field of pursuit, is the sought-for happiness found. Faust passes through precisely

the same kind of experiences as were met with in the development of Wilhelm. Like the latter, Faust discovers that the object of his pursuit is after all an *ignis fatuus.*

Then comes the illuminating finale of the drama. Not far from Faust's home there lay a large tract of marshy land, emitting miasma and causing malarial disease. He conceives the idea of draining this marshy tract and fitting it for human habitation. The very idea gives him an unprecedented sense of satisfaction and pleasure. And when, at last, as an old man, he climbs the tower that commands a view of the redeemed area and contemplates the benefit it will confer on generations not yet born, the moment of supreme bliss has arrived. *"Verweile, du bist schön,"* he exclaims, and falls back dead; not, however, into the arms of Mephistopheles, but into those of the heavenly hosts who translate him in triumph to the skies.

Nearly one hundred years have passed since these masterpieces of moral instruction were

produced, but the doctrine of happiness which they set forth has lost none of its significance during the decades that have intervened. On the contrary, it is a doctrine we need to rehearse and reassimilate; to grasp and then fix in our minds. We need to feel, as Wilhelm and Faust were made to feel, that something must take precedence over happiness. *That* cannot be the *immediate* object of our pursuit; it can be only, as Goethe intended to teach, the surprise-sequel to some worthy work in which we are engaged.

Ah, this ever-recurring demand for happiness, it is the subtle poison of our lives! We must outgrow it and learn to assign it its true and lawful place. In our nobler moods we realize that deeper than our desire to be happy and to avoid pain is the desire to touch those deeps of life where there is a joy which is more than happiness and which may involve pain. The hunger for truth, the yearning for love, the passion for personal progress, these are three desiderata which every earnest soul

wants, even at the price of pain. What trial and tribulation would we not willingly face, rather than remain ignorant of the meaning and mystery of the world in which we live? What agony would we not willingly endure rather than be incapable of love with its deep below deep of revealing? What bitterest truth would we not prefer to any sugar-coated fiction? 'Tis the path of truth, of love, of soul-growth that we crave and choose, even though we have to walk it with aching heart and bleeding feet.

Nor indeed is this a new gospel. Rather is it the gospel anew—the same gospel, forsooth, that shines forth from the pages of the Bibles of all the great religions. It sings in the noble hymns of the Veda—the oldest portion of what is probably the oldest Bible in the world. Gotama, the Buddha, brought it to the distracted people of India; Confucius carried it to the congressional halls of China; Zoroaster breathed it in the noble prayers of the "Avesta"; Mohammed made it the sub-

ject of his meditation on the Arabian desert; Jesus preached it on the shores of Galilee; Paul proclaimed it in Corinth and in Asia Minor; Dante sang it in the cantos of *The Divine Comedy;* Savonarola thundered it from the pulpit of the Duomo; Tolstoi took it for the dominant thought of his noblest novel, *Anna Karenina*—the gospel of happiness subordinate to service and this, in truth, the gateway to the truly religious life. For he alone is the truly religious man who inwardly dedicates and outwardly devotes himself to knowledge of all truth he can learn in order to do what is right and be what is good.

II

WEALTH

If happiness be not the true answer to the question at issue, is it, perchance, wealth? Suppose I have a conviction that wealth is what human life is for and that the chief end of gold is to get more gold. In that case I will bend all my energies on making money and, other things being equal, I will probably get rich, because that to which we devote ourselves with undivided attention and whole-souled allegiance we are very apt to acquire. But, now, if I thus give myself over to making all the money I can, what worth will there be in me? By a beneficent social law my accumulated fortune will be made to serve the general good, but will *my* life have been worth living? What essential worth can there be in a mere money-maker? Has he not atro-

phied every higher power of his nature by thus surrendering himself to this Mammonic ambition? Has he not crushed his soul under a huge stack of stocks and bonds? Has he not turned his back on every shining ideal and made himself as truly a thing as the machine that mints his gold? Surely it is time for ethics to vindicate the truth that when a man converts himself into a mere money-maker he commits spiritual suicide.

What was the lesson taught us by the last financial panic, with its record of industrial, commercial and domestic disasters? The lesson was that, if making money be what human life is for, then many a man and woman must have scored failure. For, during those years of business depression and financial disorder, our investments did not pay, our securities shrank, our incomes were reduced, the water was squeezed out of our stocks, dividends were not forthcoming from what seemed a "purchase." In the face of these misfortunes they who lived for making money had no alterna-

tive but to confess their life a failure. But, if, besides aiming to make money, we cared also for literature, for science, for art, for personal development and social service, then we knew that whether our bank account showed a decrease or not, we lived for "the eternal treasures of the soul, such as cannot be burned on the funeral pyre nor buried in the earth," to quote the fine phrase of Plato. Undoubtedly true it is, as some one has said, that more men are trying to get rich than are trying to be good; but find the field of the most profound struggle and the most passionate striving and it will not be where men have grown haggard with the thirst for gold. It will be where some human soul is defying its temptation and battling for its spiritual life. You and I may mourn that so much of our time is devoted to the pursuit of ephemeral ends, but the great moments that stand out in our life are those in which we surrendered ourselves to the claim of truth, in which we loved devotedly, in which we caught a vision

of Duty and saw that to spend ourselves and be spent in a worthy cause is to live.

No thoughtful observer of American life can fail to note that thousands of people are living under the inspiration of a false ideal and suffering from a moral disease. That false ideal, that mental picture of what it is supremely desirable to have, is wealth; that moral disease is pleonexia[1] (from the Greek *pleon,* more, and *echein,* to have) the grasping disease, the passion to have more and still more, without limit. We saw a symptom of this disease, not long ago, in the case of those trust companies that dishonored their trusteeship of the funds committed to their care for safe investment, by using them for private speculation. Another symptom appeared in the case of those bank officials who organized themselves into a real estate association and financed it with the deposits of their unsuspecting customers. Still another symptom is

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[1] I am indebted to Dr. Adler for the use of this descriptive term.

seen in the case of those fathers who have only a modest income on which to support their families, yet venture to invest an unwarranted portion of it in doubtful mining propositions that promise "quick and large returns." The familiar varieties of graft (like hysteria, it takes on innumerable forms) furnish another symptom of the disease, as do also the embezzlements and defalcations of which persons in all walks of life have been found guilty. But not to dwell at greater length upon the symptoms, let us note at once the fearful results. Just this disease it is that to-day is undermining the moral health of our American citizenship, polluting the fountain springs of our political and industrial life and developing among us a moneyed aristocracy—the meanest, the most contemptible of all aristocracies. It is this disease, too, that is perpetuating a false standard of success which captivates young men and women and tempts them to sacrifice every shred of honorable manhood and womanhood in order to attain it.

Mr. Austen Hopkinson, one of the largest engineering employers of labor in England, recently astonished the House of Commons by demanding a revolution in the attitude of the employing class. The employer, he maintained, is too eager to get rich and the employees will not do their best to make him a multimillionaire. He argued that the employer must refuse to become a Crœsus, and must prove to his workmen that he would not take the extra profits from the extra production their labor had brought about. Sir Frederick Banbury remarked that it was not "human nature." But there it was, actualized in the human nature of Mr. Hopkinson. "I have determined," he said, "that under no circumstances shall such an appalling fate—the fate of becoming a multimillionaire—overtake me, and the men at my works know it; in consequence the production has increased enormously. The men know that they do not add to my income by their extra production." Who can doubt that if the mentality repre-

sented by Mr. Hopkinson were to prevail in big business, industrial peace would be assured. Contrast the attitude and spirit exhibited by this industrial revolutionary with that of the wealthy paper manufacturer who, in response to my remark, "by this time you must be a veritable Crœsus," replied, "I don't know who in creation Crœsus is, but I'll match him dollar for dollar."

That expresses the spirit, the temper, the ambition cherished by thousands of people of our own time and place. And I hold that you and I have not taken the first step toward remedying this evil until we are prepared to say, in all sincerity, "I would not be a Crœsus if I could." But the question irresistibly arises —"Why not be a Crœsus if you could?" The question is altogether too large to dwell upon at length. But at least one or two reasons may be offered. In the first place then (speaking only for myself) I would not be a Crœsus if I could, because, taking the economic world as it is now constituted, I do not see

how it is possible for any one to be a multi-millionaire without somehow, somewhere, doing injury to some other human being; and I, for one, do not wish to go through life with the haunting sense of having accumulated a fabulous fortune at the price of injustice or oppression to another human soul.

Again, the effort to become a Crœsus so saps the vital energies that when, at last, the fortune has been acquired one has not the physical wherewithal to make enjoyment of it possible. Think only of that German Crœsus who offered a million dollars to any physician who could permanently cure him of his chronic indigestion. But why go to Germany for illustration? Recall those American Crœsuses who have been in the public eye for the past decade or two, and note how a just Nemesis has worked itself out in the case of nearly every one of them, bringing some to premature death, afflicting others with chronic illness and dooming them to devote the remainder of their lives to the search for

health. A third reason for refusing to be a Crœsus is that while he can buy compliments, flattery, popular acclaim, there is one thing that all his money cannot buy and that is love —the most precious thing in the world, the spontaneous response in one heart to the good will felt in another.

But, lest what has been thus far said, be misunderstood, let me hasten to say that wealth has its legitimate place and purpose as a means to ulterior ends. Wealth, it should be remembered, is not synonymous with money, though we commonly use the terms "money" and "wealth" interchangeably. Money is only a medium of exchange, a symbol of wealth, and as such it may be indefinitely increased. But to wealth there is a limit and that limit is determined by the ends it is designed to serve. Providing for one's self and one's family; securing the necessary sources for recreation as a means to continued efficiency in one's working hours; supplying means for cultivation of the higher zones of one's being; laying

aside enough to save one from being a burden on the industry of others when the time comes in which one can work no more—these may be set down as among the legitimate ends which wealth can serve, and, if we are not to be trapped by the prevailing *false* ideal of wealth, our only safety lies in steadfastly fixing our eye on these ulterior ends and making them the measure of the wealth one may ethically possess. "Whatever is in excess of one's needs, rightly estimated, is not appropriate to one, not proper to one, not his property."

III

HEALTH

As an answer to the question, What is human life for? health holds a popular place. The rapid and widespread development of interest in drugless modes of healing that to-day count their devotees by millions, attests a philosophy of life in which health is given unprecedented importance. Never before were there so many people in the world living as though health were what human life is for.

They quote Emerson's dictum, "health is the best wealth." They appeal to self-preservation as "the first law of Nature." They remind us of Herbert Spencer's saying that "ordinarily one half of life is thrown away by imperfect health." Health, they tell us, is harmony, ease; the absence of it is dis-ease. Assuredly in each of these contentions there lies a measure of truth, yet each readily shades off

into untruth. Had we to choose between wealth and health, could we have but one, we certainly would not take wealth at the expense of health. For the deplorable fact about health is that thousands have to devote so much time to merely securing it. And the very fact that we make this comment on the pursuit of health proves we do not regard it as an end in itself but rather as a means whereby some achievement is made possible. When Emerson described health as the best wealth, he thought of it as a fundamental requisite, first in the order of time, but not to be evaluated as, in itself, wealth. It is true that the higher ends of life are partly defeated by ill health, that when the body is disordered we become less sensitive to the impress of nature and the human spirit; it is true that impairment of nerve force spells poorer thinking, weakened will, lessened capacity for service. Yet to make the end and aim of one's life the maintenance of health would be like spending one's time and thought and labor on the foundation

of a house and never proceeding to erect a superstructure. Grant that health is harmony, ease. But ease is not the best thing in the world. The fact is that bodily health sometimes proves to be a kind of carnal luxury, an incentive to selfish indulgence and, in consequence, a moral danger—as many a healthy ease-loving man and woman can testify. In a very real sense one may lose one's soul through the very healthfulness of the body, even as imperfect health may be a blessing in disguise. "Give me health and a day," said Emerson, "and I will make the pomp of emperors ridiculous." But there are those who, in all sincerity, have been able to say give me ill health and a day and we will put imperial pomp into the darkest shade. They looked upon their malady as a sublime challenge to do their utmost, being handicapped. It was no jest of the Southern senator, who, when asked how he managed to achieve so much, replied, "by never being very well." The consolation vouchsafed to invalids is that pain has been

one of the most effective educators of the human race. To be able to say to pain, "you can have no power over me save as I furnish the weapons," attests the spiritual nature in man and persuades him that his essential selfhood is spiritual and therefore cannot perish. The origin of evil may be an insoluble problem, but that this one form of evil, pain, may thus be turned to good, proves that it is not wholly evil. True it certainly is that the fairest and sweetest flower of spiritual culture is that which has grown on the tree of humanity when watered by the tears of suffering.

From whichever side, therefore, we approach the matter of health, it clearly is not what human life is for. The most that can be claimed for it is that it offers a chance, an opportunity to attain something beyond itself. And precisely as the *raison d'être* of the foundation is the house, so the justification of health is its conditioning achievement.

IV

CULTURE

We come next to "culture" in terms of which a fourth answer to the question at issue has been given. If we say that human life is for culture we are at once confronted with the difficulty of determining what is meant by culture. Mr. John Bright has told us that culture is "knowledge of the Greek and Roman classics." If we accept his definition we are forced to conclude that a very large portion of the race has missed the ultimate object of human life. The late distinguished essayist, Mr. Frederic Harrison, defined culture as "that mental equipment which fits one for criticizing new books." But if this equipment be culture, and culture is what human life is for, then thousands of persons must be set down as having failed in the fine art of life. Again, Mr. Matthew Arnold would fain have per-

suaded us that culture is "acquaintance with the best thought and action of the past." Yet here, again, we must conclude that if the purpose of life is to be interpreted in terms of this acquisition, other thousands must be pronounced uncultured, and minus that which human life is for. Still another authority defines culture as "an *ensemble* of literary taste, æsthetic sensibility and refined manners," a trio of accomplishments scarcely attainable save as leisure and wealth combine to furnish the prerequisites. How then shall we answer our question in terms of culture? These definitions bring us no closer to a satisfying answer than we were before.

There is indeed a conception of culture, fundamentally ethical, which might serve our purpose. And just here, by way of anticipating the true answer, a word may be said of it. It is the kind of culture that results from looking upon the world as a vast gymnasium and human beings as existing in it for exercise, for the development of all their powers of head

and heart and will—that totality of faculties to which we give the name soul. Every calling may bear witness to such culture.

Thus, for example, the civil engineer who "trestled" the great gulch in the Siskiyou mountains achieved one of the world's triumphs in railroad construction. But the supreme significance of the trestle lies not in its service to the tourist and the commercial world; rather does its greatest value lie in the mastery of mind over matter which it symbolizes, in the developed mentality of the engineer and architect through the difficulties overcome, the problems solved, the lessons learned while the work was in progress. The testimony of Leonardo da Vinci, the master-mind of the Renaissance, is to the same effect. He, the man of myriad-mindedness, confessed that the ultimate worth of his artistic achievements lay not in the prospective service they might render to people of æsthetic sensibility, but in the reaction of his creative energy upon his own personality, making him more fully and

more deeply a man. And this experience of the engineer and the artist may have its precise parallel in every other vocation, even in the lowliest and least conspicuous. No matter what the calling in which a man or woman is engaged, each must measure its value not only in terms of the particular utilitarian end which it may serve but also (and primarily) in terms of what it does for personal development in the way of increased skill, widened vision, deepened patience and fidelity to one's task. Here then is a conception of culture that relates not to any particular kind of attainment, be it in the realm of science, or of art, or of any other vocation, but which relates, rather, to the interior reaction of the given attainment upon personality—a conception of culture, forsooth, that has universal applicability because such inward culture (essentially ethical) is attainable by all human beings whatever their station or calling in life may be.

But in view of the variety of interpretations put upon the word "culture," and par-

ticularly the popular connotation which makes it stand for what the majority of mankind do not possess, we shrink from using it to describe what human life is for. True, this last of the definitions offered might well justify acceptance of "culture" as an answer to our question. But to be of practical service the term would have to be always accompanied by this definition.

V

THE KEY TO A SATISFYING ANSWER

THUS far we have taken account of four popular answers to the query with which a philosophy of life is primarily concerned, and we have found them to be alike unsatisfying. Without pausing to consider other popular answers that might be offered, and that would prove to be as inadequate as the foregoing, let us turn at once to the key which makes a satisfying answer possible. Ask the question once more, but with emphasis on the word "human" —What is *human* life for? So to ask it is to fix attention on the fact that man has something distinctive about him, possessing characteristics that differentiate him from all else that lives. Plants, we say, are living things. They are characterized as a class in that they take in, chemically transform, appropriate and organize the basic energies of sun, soil and air;

but they have not the autonomous power to move about in space; they are, in Korzybski's phrase, "binders of the basic energies of the world." Animals, like plants, take in, transform, organize and appropriate the energies of sun, soil and air *as prepared already by the plants.* But, unlike the latter, animals possess autonomous power to creep or crawl, or swim, or fly, or run. As such, animals are "space-binders." Man, like the animals, has this autonomous power, but unlike them, he revealed, half a million years or more ago, a strange new energy, in virtue of which civilization was initiated. It is "the power that invents, the power that imagines, conceives, reasons; it is the power that makes philosophy, science, art, and all the other forms of material and spiritual wealth; the power that detects the uniformities of Nature, creates history, and foretells the future; it is the power that makes progress possible and actual, discerns excellence, acquires wisdom, and, in the midst of a hostile world, more and more determines its

own destiny. The animals have it not, or, if they have, they have it in a measure so small that we may neglect it, as mathematicians neglect infinitesimals of higher order. By virtue of that familiar yet ever-strange human power, each generation inherits the fruit of the creative toil of bygone generations, augments the inheritance, and transmits it to the generations to come; thus the dead survive in the living, destined with the living to greet the unborn. If this be poetry, it is also fact. Past, Present, and Future are not three; in man they are spiritually united to constitute *one living* reality."[2] Man is the "time-binder," and though this activity involves space-binding as a higher involves a lower, yet is the time-binding ability, the peculiar exclusive or differentiating capacity of man,—invention breeding invention, science begetting science, things done, the instruments for the doing of better things, every inheritance held in trust for enlargement and for transmission to future

[2] C. J. Keyser in the *Hibbert Journal*, 1922.

man in the time-building process. But there exists still another differentiation besides this set forth by the Polish nobleman.

Man, the biologist tells us, is an animal and the highest member of the animal kingdom. But the ethicist, while accepting this classification, bids the biologist note that man constitutes a class of which he is the only member. For man is the only animal that can see visions and dream dreams. And

> As our dreams are, so are we;
> Our dreams are but the mirror of ourselves.
> We shape in thought what soon we dress in deeds,
> And, what we daily do within the heart, we grow to be;
> Our visions are ourselves.[3]

Man is the only member of the animal kingdom who can see an ideal and strive for its realization. Of him only can it be said that his eyes reach further than his hands, beyond a good he has grasped to an ulterior best that

[3] Bernard Carpenter, "Liber Amoris."

beckons him. Only he can engage in worship —the response of an imperfect soul to a vision of the perfect. To him alone is it given to feel under an inner compulsion, like that which gives structure to the crystal, yet to find himself most free when thus ethically constrained. Man alone, of all creatures, is *conscious* of failure and capable of seeing it as a blessing. For animals, the moment's choice is their only law and necessity; the gratification of physical instincts and desires, their only aspiration; impulse is their duty, innocence their joy, instinct their religion. But man feels himself living in eternity with power to see the things of time under the aspect of eternity. The pallor of remorse, the blush of failure, the sigh of contrition, the prayer of aspiration toward the unattained—all these are within the range of *human* experience alone; these combine to put man in a class apart from crystals and trees and all the tribes of animals, intimating that he belongs to a spiritual realm, the mark of which is eternality.

Man shares with the lower animals a number of wants, such as food, shelter, reproduction; but when these have been satisfied he and they part company. They can go no further, whereas he has merely put his foot on the lowest rung of a ladder that reaches up to the infinitely perfect. Man alone has worth as distinguished from value. I did not originate this distinction. I should be proud if I had. It is mine only by adoption and meditation upon it. Professor Adler, it was, who initiated the vital, capital distinction between the terms.

> Value [he says] is subjective, the worth notion is the most objective conceivable. That has value which satisfies our needs or wants. We possess value for one another, for the reason that each one of us has wants which the others alone are capable of satisfying as in the case of sex, of coöperation, in the vocation, etc. But value ceases when the want or need is gratified.

Worth, on the other hand, means value on one's own account and man only has value

on his own account while all other creatures and things have value with reference to some ulterior object or end. Gold, for instance, has value as a medium of exchange, or as a means of adornment. Food has value as a source of sustenance. But man has value without regard to anything beyond himself and to this the word "worth" has been fittingly applied. Man, again, is the only creature equal to shaping a world of his own. He alone has achieved the supreme co-relation—the family. To him alone was it vouchsafed to see moral chaos and forthwith endeavor to convert it into cosmos. Only man is empowered to see *ideal* relationships, and like the Platonic archetypal "ideas" to see these relationships as divine entities to be embodied in terrestrial life. The lion, the fox, the vulture, each of these animals has a trait peculiar to itself, an *unchangeable* trait. The lion has his ferocity fixed, the fox has his cunning fixed, the vulture has his rapacity fixed. Not thus is it with man. He may be born into the world with one or more of these traits but

not only can he change them, but, what is more, he feels morally responsible for the effort to change them.

Yea, so fearfully and wonderfully are we humans made that our finite nature can find permanent rest only in the thought of the infinite, in the ever closer approximation of the human to the divine. And in the effort to achieve this advance we feel that our life is embedded in a soil deeper than our own nature, that we stand in cosmic as well as terrestrial relations, giving infinite significance to our life.

Nay, more, within each one of us there is enshrined a constant residuum of capacity for improvement, no matter how many times we fail. Beneath the ashes of our moral failure there lies buried a spark of potentiality, never quite extinguished and waiting to be fanned into a flame.

The moral nature of man, with its latent potentialities and its inability ever to be *permanently* satisfied with anything short of the infinite, endless approximation of the human

to the divine—all this testifies to the truth that man is essentially a spiritual being and can be accounted for only in terms of a spiritual origin. This is what an ancient Hebrew writer expressed in the words, "God made man in His own image." Just as an artist in the Renaissance sometimes painted a miniature portrait of himself in the lower left corner of his picture in order to authenticate the work, so the World-Artist put the stamp of his own likeness on man to attest his divine origin. Hence it is that the lowest of human beings commands our respect and is to be regarded as our equal; not that he actually is so, but because he is potentially so, may become so by proper treatment, he having the same moral nature, the same latent power as we, waiting to be called forth.

Given all these possessions and powers in virtue of which we are *human* beings, it becomes clear to us what human life is for. It is for growth, for soul-development, using the word soul to cover the totality of noncorporeal

powers. What *must* the life of a being thus endowed, empowered, gifted, privileged be for? Assuredly it must be for the unfolding of all its latent possibilities of thought-power, will-power, service-power.

Given a being with characteristics that distinguish him from all other life-forms on the earth and he can read his duty in terms of them. Succinctly stated that duty is as follows: Don't live a merely sensual life, for you are not an animal. Don't live a supernatural life, because you are not an angel. Don't live a wicked life, because you are not a demon. Don't live an aimless life, because you are not an insect. Don't live yesterday's life lest you become a murmurer. Don't live to-morrow's life lest you become a visionary. But live the life of happy yesterdays and confident to-morrows in the life of to-day—a divinely human life, because you are "a God though in the germ." This phrase from "Rabbi Ben Ezra" suggests the contribution which the supreme poet of the philosophy of

life has made to our subject. Browning is still the most spiritually awakening mind in English poetry. His message is one calculated to invigorate us with a divine courage and patience; to save us from sinking into cynicism and pessimism; to guard us against that most unsettling of all temptations—the temptation to gauge success by external results rather than by internal aims. Nay, more, this poet-philosopher, in the noblest products of his genius, answers the question—"What is human life for—with singular positiveness and precision. In confirmation of this statement let the following typical quotations suffice: In "Cleon" he asks: "Why stay we on the earth except to grow?" In another of his shorter poems—"The Statue and the Bust"—that most-misunderstood and least-appreciated of them all—Browning lays down the doctrine that inaction, irresolution, dallying with a purpose, is fatal to soul-growth:

> The sin I impute to each frustrate ghost,
> Is the unlit lamp and the ungirt loin.

In "A Death in the Desert" we read:

> Progress is man's distinctive work alone,
> Not God's and not the beast's: He is, they are,
> Man partly is and wholly hopes to be.

Again, in the "Parleyings" the poet inquires:

> What were our life did soul stand still therein,
> Forego her strife through the ambiguous present,
> To some all-reconciling future?

Once more, in "Rabbi Ben Ezra," one of the simplest and noblest expressions of the poet's genius, he affirms emphatically and exaltingly:

> What I aspired to be
> And was not, comforts me,
> A brute I might have been, but would not
> sink i' the scale.

The fact that the human spirit is always finite in actual life but infinite in potentiality, the fact that limitless possibilities reside in even the lowest and most undeveloped soul,

the fact that failure is a blessing in that on the one hand it saves us from sinking into self-complacency and, on the other, sustains in us a divine discontent; the fact that these commonplace lives of ours can be transfigured through such agencies as doubt, temptation, adversity, loss, grief; the fact that human personality may evolve into ever closer and closer approximation to the divine—this is the sublime ethical message which Browning brings home to us as no other poet of either the present or the past.

To him life was like the climbing of some great mountain whose peaks rise one above another, each summoning us to reach its height, and at each new level broadening the perspective and deepening the content of our life. Life to him was a process of endless growth, upward and onward toward that image of the Divine in which we all are potentially made. He saw that life is life only while there is growth, that all the good actions of our yesterdays mean only the acquisition of so much

moral power with which to do good to-day, and all our accumulated knowledge only so much intellectual power for new truth-seeking; nay, both the intellectual and the moral power doomed to atrophy and death save as we revitalize them by new deeds of service and new reachings out toward the infinite truth.

Boldly and without fear of contradiction may we assert that soul-development, as our poet has defined it, is a possibility for every child of man. No circumstances, no conditions are there, of which it may be said that they prohibit the possibility of soul-growth. Do you say you were born indifferent, selfish, hot-tempered, cold-hearted and cannot therefore be otherwise? The highest authorities on heredity unite in affirming that you *can* and that the first requisite is to feel you *ought* to be different. You can *because* you ought, as Kant contended. Emerson phrased the same conviction in the familiar couplet:

> When Duty whispers low, thou must,
> The youth replies, I can.

True, we human beings are not responsible for the evil tendencies inherited from a human and a brute ancestry. So far as moral merit is concerned, each one of us begins life regardless of antecedents. The man or woman born with a craving for intoxicating liquor is not responsible for that craving. His or her responsibility is only for the degree to which that craving is permitted to assert itself, only for the effort put forth to master the craving. This is the ethical substitute for the theosophical doctrine of reincarnation as related to karma. Instead of explaining the character and condition into which each one of us has been born in terms of some earlier incarnation and the "karma" that is "working itself out," I would present the doctrine of moral merit as being wholly independent of antecedent condition. No matter what my brute-inheritance or my human inheritance may be, I *can* strive to control it, to change it, and, what is more, I am conscious of moral responsibility for not yielding to inherited dispositions and proclivities. All of

us are born with both attractive and repulsive qualities, yet moral goodness and badness consists not in the possession of them but in what we do with them. Nor indeed does our true self reside in any evil quality save as we adopt it into our will and give ourselves over to it. We are not blameworthy for being attracted to forbidden pleasures, we are to blame only for our yielding to them, adopting them into our will. Away with the preachment that our moral nature can no more resist behaving as it does than the ripe apple on the tree can resist the law of gravitation that pulls it to the earth. Away with the doctrine that heredity, environment, constitution, temperament, have made us what we are and forever prevent our acting as free moral agents. The advocates of such fatalism would fain persuade us that the dictum of the poet "I am the captain of my soul" is utter nonsense, that the real captain of the soul is this combine of forces physical, psychical, sociological that have made us what we

are. True, this combine does exert a mighty influence often and grievously, very often and very grievously, yet the real culprit is not they, but their possessor. *He* did the evil deed and is ultimately responsible for the sin. He might have avoided it, because an originally weak motive can be made the strongest by persistent, resolute attention to it, so that at last it displaces its rival. Such is the teaching of modern, scientific psychology which we need to set over against the false preaching of present-day fatalism.

To put forth our true self, our thought-power, our love-power, our will-power, *that* is the cardinal characteristic of the moral life and never can there be an end to the developing of such power. This fundamental, ethical truth, it was that inspired one of the noblest poems of our American literature entitled "The Eternal Will" by Ella Wheeler Wilcox, and from which I quote the following lines:

There is no thing we cannot overcome.
Say not thy evil instinct is inherited,
Or that some trait inborn makes thy whole life
forlorn
And calls down punishment that is not merited.

Back of thy parents and grandparents lies
The great eternal Will. That too is thine
Inheritance; strong, beautiful, divine,
Sure lever of success for one who tries.

Pry up thy fault with this great lever—Will.
However deeply bedded in propensity,
However firmly set, I tell thee firmer yet
Is that vast power that comes from Truth's
immensity.

There is no noble height thou canst not climb.
All triumphs may be thine in Time's futurity,
If, whatso'er thy fault, thou dost not faint or
halt . . .
The soul's divine inheritance is best.

Do you say, with the Apostle Paul, that man is constitutionally incapable of doing "the good that he would," of rising from his dead self to higher things, that only the borrowed righteousness of the Christ can lift him, that without this he remains morally impotent to

improve? Then I reply, with Jesus, that unlimited moral possibilities reside in every human soul, making rational and justifiable his plea "be ye perfect." Everywhere in Jesus' teachings it is assumed that despite our proneness to sin inexhaustible power for moral progress is a permanent asset of our spiritual nature. Beneath the ashes of our moral failure there lies hidden a spark, glowing still and capable of being fanned into a flame. Else what meaning in the cry "repent"? Why bid men "do the divine will," if there be in man no constant capacity for moral progress?

Do you set up the plea of the old orthodox catechism that man is weak and must petition a heavenly Father for help? I reply with the founder of the Ethical Movement that there is a "God-force" in each human soul and we dishonor it when we dare to fall back on that ancient theological plea. Alas for him who says: "I have done the best I could and must now leave my destiny in the hands of a higher power." No man ever did the best of which

he is capable in one day or in all the days of his life. The Pharisee in the New Testament story made it his boast that he had done his best and ever since the world has looked with contempt upon that supercilious soul, while with sympathy and pity has it looked upon the poor publican who smote himself upon the breast saying, "God be merciful to me, a sinner." That man had climbed up into the heights of his being and, looking down sorrowfully at his lower self, realized that he was still very far from having done the best of which he felt capable.

Not only is the "God-force" given but the God-way is also given. For, there is a way of living here and now for you and for me, different indeed for each one of us according to our education, environment, calling, yet unalterably fixed for each one of us and unquestioningly recognized when found.

Let every young man and woman beware of the fiction that the discovery of this way can be postponed till the period of youth has been

passed. Youth is indeed the time for enjoyment, for indulgence in sports and pastimes, but it is also the time for character and conviction, for self-dedication to a worthy purpose, for self-surrender to the claims of conscience and good judgment. If in the dawn of young manhood and womanhood there has been no aspiration toward these ends it will be well-nigh impossible to reach out toward them when the noontide of life has arrived. Let it not be forgotten that life is a problem in proportion and if young people are to save themselves from moral anarchy there is but one way in which it can be done, namely: By practicing the Greek virtue *sophrosune.* For want of an adequate English word we translate this "temperance." But to the Greeks temperance had a very different connotation from what it has for us. We use it to convey the idea of abstinence. Every temperance society is a total abstinence society. But to the Greeks temperance had no such negative import. On the contrary, to them it had only

positive significance. It meant the right use of all things in right relation and with due regard to life as a whole. It meant seeing the moral life not as a fight between the spirit and the flesh but as a task in organization, our business being to organize our life, not in enmity to any one instinct or impulse, but with due regard for all—the ultimate aim being "health of soul" as Plato called it. Alas, how often is shipwreck made of promising lives through failure to see, in youth, that life is a problem in proportion—calling for the supervising of conflicting tendencies and tastes and maintaining a just balance. Every young man and woman, therefore, as they set sail on the ocean of life should first provide themselves with a life-chart, then, calling aboard the crew of their faculties, spread the canvas of consecration to a worthy life-aim and steering out into the broad ocean of opportunity, leave a cargo of beneficent influence at every port they touch. It may be that we cannot have happiness, as it is commonly understood. It

may be that we cannot have wealth, in the common acceptation of the term as synonymous with great riches. It may be that poor health will handicap us all our days. It may be that culture, as the schoolmen conceive it, will be forever beyond us. But we all can have an ever larger quantum of worth. For every time we see a fault in ourselves and correct it, every time we conquer some base impulse that would conquer us, we add to our worth. Every time we take other lives into our own, or go out to them, reaching down to hidden beauty or power and calling it forth, we simultaneously call forth what is best in ourselves; we enhance the spiritual value of our life, we realize anew the spiritual nature of our essential selfhood; we become conscious of life as a continuous process of acquiring worth.

Does the growth-process cease with our earthly life, and, if so, can we say we have a *satisfying* answer to our question? This is the second of the two paramount issues

which, at the outset, were set forth as involved in a philosophy of life—a transcendent aim and a destiny for man worthy of that aim. If human life be for the acquisition of worth and the process ends at death, how shall the process be justified? Can the cosmos be rational and ethical if man, the highest product of its evolutionary process, be thus victimized by death, doomed to discontinue the pursuit which alone gave meaning and sacredness to his life? To this question we must now address ourselves.

VI

IS DEATH THE END?

LET it be said at once that for those who estimate human life in terms of worth and who live for the higher satisfactions bound up with acquisition of it, nothing is so difficult as disbelief in personal survival of death. Like Plato and Dante and Goethe and Browning they are forced, by their own ever deeper and intenser moral living, to believe that there is something within them that cannot perish. Professor Adler is their spokesman when he says, "I admit that I do not so much *desire* immortality, as that I do not see how I can escape it. On moral grounds I do not see how my being can stop short of the attainment marked out for it, of the goal set up for it." [4]

Well enough for the sensualist, the bon-vivant, the epicure, well enough for those who

[4] *Life and Destiny*, pp. 38, 39.

have lived for the *lower* satisfactions of life, to be indifferent to its continuance after death. But for those who have lived for the *higher* satisfactions, the case is altogether the reverse. They simply cannot think of their spiritual selfhood as ceasing, just because the moral imperative to pursue the ideal is unconditioned by either circumstance or time. In their judgment the man who is *satisfied* with personal annihilation at death gives evidence thereby of defective spiritual breeding. Many a thoughtful man, it is true, finds himself *intellectually* driven to agnosticism, or perhaps even to outright denial of a hereafter; but if his moral nature does not revolt at what his intellect affirms it would seem to indicate that he had never lived the moral life deeply and intensely, so irresistibly does such living compel revulsion from the thought of spiritual annihilation at death. See with what marvelous condensation of thought and with what melody and strength in the exalted movement of the lines of "Wages," Tennyson has

expressed this truth. What wages would Virtue have, he asks?

> She desires no isles of the blest, no quiet seats of the just,
> To rest in a golden grove, or to bask in a summer sky,
> Give her the wages of *going on* and *not* to die.

The man of moral seriousness, who looks upon life as a sacred privilege and trust, whose moral horizon embraces ambitions that are worthy and ideals that exalt and inspire; the man who sees what he ought to be and sustains a silent sorrow at seeing what he is—that man will look upon survival of death as a priceless boon, not because it offers anticipated rewards and delights, but because it offers opportunity for continuing the great task of spiritual sculpture which here on earth he had only begun, opportunity for hewing still further, out of the rough marble of life's experience, the statue of the perfect character; opportunity to carry closer to completion the dimensions of

his being, to bring nearer to maturity the great life purpose that here had time only to blossom, or perchance only to bud.

Nature has written in the constitution of each human soul the law of its being—develop the real you are into the ideal you ought to be. But the ideal can never be completely realized. As space is the infinite in astronomy, as time is the infinite in geology, so perfection is the infinite in ethics. The ideal flies ever before us and it is often most passionately pursued when it seems furthest away.

Yes, the ideal is unattainable and loyal pursuit of the unattainable ideal is our highest possible attainment. Most of us can climb only a short way up the mount Perfection when our progress is stopped by death. Here then, on the one hand, is Nature imposing upon us the moral obligation to strive toward the Perfect; and here, on the other hand, is Death, seemingly bringing that moral obligation to naught by cutting off the loyal pursuit when it has little more than begun. How shall

the riddle be solved, how shall the opposing claims be reconciled? Only two alternatives, it would seem, are open to us. Either death is *not* the end and opportunity will be afforded for continuing the ascent, or else death *is* the end and Nature defeats her purpose in the creating of man. If loyal pursuit of the unattainable ideal be what Nature decreed for the human species, then Nature would be irrational were she to cut off that pursuit at death. And, if loyal pursuit of that ideal constitutes the right to pursue it still, Nature would be immoral, or at least unmoral, were she to ignore that right. It was just this double conviction that led the lamented Francis E. Abbot to describe immortality as "an ethical necessity." Nearer than that to demonstration we cannot come, in the present state of our knowledge. Hitherto no *objective* evidence for immortality has been adduced by researchers in the psychical field, not even by Sir Oliver Lodge, albeit he has adduced much that approximates objective evidence. But,

as he himself said, in his address before the British Association for the Advancement of Science, "no *precise* bit of evidence has hitherto been produced in favor of the hypothesis of discarnate intelligence." Nor has the subsequent publication of his book, *Raymond,* given cause for modification of that statement, as every careful analyst of the evidence will have observed. Demonstration of immortality as yet there is none; our nearest approach to it is that interpretation of immortality which makes it "an *ethical* necessity."

The only rational view of our earthly pilgrimage is that of a *progressus ad Parnassum,* upward and onward toward ever fuller development of the spiritual potentialities within us. If then, when our earthly pilgrimage ends our goal is still infinitely beyond us, shining like a star in the distant heavens while we are, as it were, in an abyss, looking, *de profundis,* at the star—what escape is there from the frightful unreason of such a situation? I answer, it is that death does *not*

end the pilgrimage; that somehow, somewhere, in the universal plan, provision will be made either for resuming the interrupted pilgrimage or, if not that, then for something equivalent thereto, which our finite minds are incapable of conceiving.

To my reason the only possible solution of the mystery of the moral life is the eternality of our spiritual selfhood. That ultimate reality in each one of us is hidden, it cannot be apprehended as to what it is substantively but manifests itself only in its effects, its attributes, and to define it is to describe these. The essential selfhood is the fountain source of ethical energy; an energy "*sui generis,* underivative, unique. And because it is unique, it points toward *a unique, irreducible, hence substantive entity in man* from which it springs." [5] So speaks Professor Adler in his discussion of this "spiritual numen" in man. That he thinks of it as perduring beyond the

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[5] *An Ethical Philosophy of Life,* Felix Adler, p. 92. The italics are mine.

lifetime of the "empirical self" is made clear in the following passage from the chapter of his book on "how to learn to see the spiritual numen in others." Here he writes "The god in the other, the *eternal personality* in the inner sanctuary of the other, is the object that must be sought and touched." [6] Here the eternality of the "essential self" is explicitly conceded, but, mark you, it is to be carefully differentiated from the popular conception of immortality, with its "suggestion that new organs may replace the worn-out terrestrial body."

> Immortality as popularly held [he says] involves the continued existence, in some *empirical* form, of the essential central entity in man. But, as to my empirical self (in the last outlook on life) I let go my hold on it. It is the real self, of which the empirical was the substratum, upon which I tighten my hold. Immortality, like creation, is a bridge between the phenomenal and spiritual levels. Creation is the bridge at the beginning, immortality, the bridge at the end. Were I able to build the bridge I should

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[6] *Op. cit.*, 225.

know. I do not affirm immortality. I affirm the real and irreducible existence of the essential self.[7]

While freely acknowledging this capital distinction between "immortality" and "eternal personality," the two terms serving to separate for us an empirical and a spiritual viewpoint, I am bound to acknowledge the partial character, the limited power of my reason and hence I would refrain from expressing my solution of the problem dogmatically, as an undebatable proposition. Dogma is assertion without evidence, affirmation without adequate reason and as long as we are dealing with the essential self, an "entity which is itself incognizable," dealing with a postulate that "ethics cannot get on without," we must practice intellectual modesty to the utmost. It may be, despite all our logic, that in the universal plan not a single soul shall be accounted of sufficient value to the universe to warrant its preservation. It may be that some altogether different solution of the mystery than that of soul-eternality lies hidden at the heart of things;

[7] *Ibid.*, 167, 359.

but, that the solution must be both rational and ethical I am bound to believe.

We are stationed here on this earth, between two great ignorances. For when we talk of origins we don't know exactly whence we came and when we are discussing destiny we don't know exactly whither we go. What then remains between these two ignorances? There remains *the kind of behavior we adopt.* We have to choose between living like immortals and living like the day-fly, dead at sundown. Grant that the mystery of the origin of things is insoluble; grant that the mystery of the hereafter is equally impenetrable; there yet remains a higher and a lower order of life, and a choice to be made between them. Accept, if you will, the simile which likens life to a midnight sea illumined by a single streak of light; and man to a ship, crossing that lightened pathway, emerging from the darkness and presently disappearing in the further darkness, you none the less would think it worth while, even in that brief moment, to catch the

light upon your sails and *while* you live, to live in *the light!*

When, in our pursuit of knowledge concerning man's persistence as a spiritual being, we reach the place where knowledge fails, faith must hold sway. The ethics of investigation on post-mortem conditions requires of us that, having caught the light upon our sails, we trustfully steer our ship forward and with the requisite moral heroism face the ulterior darkness. If Calderon be right in regarding life as but a dream, then 'tis for us to live well throughout the dream and trust the waking, whatever it may be. Since we cannot prove either the negations of doubt nor the affirmations of faith we can none the less

> Be wise in this dream-world of ours;
> Nor take our dial for our deity,
> But make the passing shadow serve our will.

The story is told of a college president touring the Bernese Alps, and attempting the perilous passage over the Gemmi Pass from Badleuk on the one side to Kandersteg on the

other. When he reached the top of the pass he looked vainly about for the trail that would conduct him to his destination. All he saw was the merest suggestion of a trail, the kind a mountain sheep, were it sure-footed, would risk its life upon, but scarcely one that a human being would venture. Concluding that he must have mistaken the road up the mountain he was about to retrace his steps in search of the right trail when he spied a small Swiss boy standing about thirty feet away. "Where is Kandersteg?" he cried. "I don't know, sir," replied the lad, "but there's the road to it," pointing to that hazardous trail. Without knowing it that Swiss boy had stated the whole practical philosophy of life. *You don't need to see your destination if you are on the right road.* In such a situation—and it is symbolic of that in which we humans here on earth find ourselves stationed—only three alternatives are open to us. First, we can sit down, if our inertia be in excess of our motive power. Second, we can go back, if our desire to remi-

nisce be stronger than our passion to be prophetic. Third, we can go on! In the sacred name of that constant residuum of capacity for improvement which resides in every one of us; in the sacred name of our inability ever to be permanently satisfied with anything short of the infinite, I say, let us go on and with moral heroism take the ethics of an eternal being for our guide.

Thus in harmony with the definition of a philosophy of life with which we set out the particular end enthroned as sovereign over all other ends is, in a word, growth or the development of ethical energy and the ultimate personal destiny worthy of that end is eternality of the essential self. Being spiritual it cannot perish, though the "how" of its persistence lies wholly outside our ken.

VII

SPIRITUAL VALUES

GIVEN such a philosophy of life, to what spiritual values can we point as deriving from it, what practical helpful function can it fulfill in the conduct of life? Surely we do well to consider the subject here in this our Meeting House, our temple of consecration and resolve, where opportunity is regularly offered for serious thought, for quiet reflection, for quickening the springs of the moral life, for spiritual renewal.[8] Here in this serene atmosphere where the deep things of the spirit can be contemplated with concentration and calm, where the moral ideal makes its most powerful appeal, where we verify the conviction that "the place where men meet to seek the highest is holy ground"—surely here it

[8] The substance of this chapter was originally presented in an address before the Society for Ethical Culture of New York.

is fitting and desirable that we dwell upon this fundamental practical subject—spiritual values in a philosophy of life.

On the homeward voyage from Europe last July a fellow passenger called attention to some of the tragic failures and glaring contradictions that confront us in every walk of life, for example, the tragic failure of a life that has lost its equilibrium and become "a distracted riot of disordered forces"; the glaring contradiction between our uncalculating devotion to a great cause, as in the late War, and our immersion in clashing interests, social ambitions, selfish success. Could there be any question that this failure and this contradiction betoken the lack of a guiding philosophy of life in which great practical, spiritual values inhere? Consider with me some of the more important of these.

VIII

THE BALANCED LIFE

First, planfulness, connectedness, wholeness, balance is given to our life when governed by a philosophy of life. It is forthwith saved from being heterogeneous and fragmentary because it is overarched and controlled by a supreme and unifying aim which the philosophy has supplied. Without that our conduct gets shaped by mere impulse, or by expediency when it might have a basis worthy of respect. Plato's plea in the *Republic* was for the planned life, the life set in order, organized in conformity with a hierarchy of desires and interests. He held, as we have seen, that life is a problem in proportion and that if we are to save ourselves from moral anarchy there is only one way in which it can be done, namely, by practicing *sophrosune*. Such a doctrine of balance involved recognition

of all our human instincts and impulses, none bad in itself, but all good when functioning in an organized life, our business being to organize it, not in enmity to any one instinct or impulse, but with a due regard for all.

Perhaps in no closer way is Plato related to our age than by his message touching the organized life. And out of the Middle Age, no less than from antiquity, comes a message bound up with the modern need to achieve the balanced life.

Last June while browsing in a Sicilian bookstore I came upon a new life of St. Francis of Assisi. It brought home to me afresh the intimate relation between his gospel and our present-day problem of organizing the personal life. Why is it that this most lovable of all the medieval Saints stands in such significant relation to us of the modern world? The answer is because he had something to give of which we are desperately in need if the balanced life is to be ours. He was strong where we are weak, just as he was weak where we

are strong. His character shone in attributes wherein ours is deficient. A sorry mistake it is to suppose that because St. Francis belonged to the Middle Age he has nothing for the world of to-day. His intense moral earnestness, his profound spirituality, his infinite tenderness for all subhuman creatures, his sincere sympathy with Nature, his firm grip on the truth that "the wages of sin is death," his fixed habit of looking at the things of time under the aspect of eternity—these six characteristics of his personality we need in order to balance our absorption in material interests, our devotion to scientific pursuits, our allegiance to utilitarian standards of progress and success. The medieval theology of St. Francis had elements that have long since lost their appeal, but the moral and spiritual qualities that were his we sorely need if we are to gain that balance which is one of the spiritual values which such a philosophy of life as has been sketched inspires.

IX

THE THREEFOLD INVIGORATION

A SECOND spiritual value appears in the power of that philosophy of life to invigorate us with a divine patience and heroism. For, as we have seen, it is a fleeing goal that we pursue—endless approximation of an unattainable ideal. Only in what is infinite can the soul find permanent satisfaction, and so we courageously face the ages in which the elimination of brute-inheritance will be slowly and painfully achieved by the human race and the way prepared for positive spiritual acquisitions such as it has not entered into the heart of man to conceive. Moreover, in the wake of this spiritual value, comes the precious asset of enthusiasm without which no worth-while work can ever be done. Nay, more, there comes also the call to baptize, in the tears of our disap-

pointment, those cherished ideas of our philosophy with which, perchance, our dearest friends have not sympathized, and mature them into unqualified worthiness.

X

POISE IN BEREAVEMENT

THE gain of inward calm, composure, poise, when disquieted and shaken by adversity, bereavement, grief—this is a third spiritual value of which account must be taken. How often have we seen people go all to pieces, as we say, under the crushing blow of some tragic experience when they might, by the aid of a philosophy of life, have been proof against spiritual disaster. True it is that in the first days of a deepening grief we are unresponsive to everything except the silent sympathy of understanding souls. When the heart is heavy with the dull sense of an irreparable loss the mind refuses to act, but, as the sorrow deepens down, the hour comes in which our philosophy of life can help us, and we exchange "the spirit of heaviness for the garment of praise." Our foremost witness to this truth is Tennyson. In

his spiritual masterpiece, "In Memoriam" (which surpasses his artistic masterpiece, "The Idylls of the King," in the universality of its appeal), Tennyson recorded the spiritual condition in which he found himself when bereft of his dearest friend, Arthur Henry Hallam, the friend whom he described as "more than my brothers are to me." In the sixteenth canto of the poem Tennyson tells us that

> The shock so harshly given
> Confused me like the unhappy bark
> That strikes by night a craggy shelf,
> And staggers blindly ere she sink
> And stunned me from my power to think
> And all my knowledge of myself;
>
> And made me that delirious man
> Whose fancy fuses old and new,
> And flashes into false and true,
> And mingles all without a plan.

But as the sorrow deepened down, the poet came to himself, and by means of his philosophy of life attained those heights of serene faith and spiritual joy to which we climb in the closing cantos of the poem. Browning,

too, in the poetry dealing with immortality, testified to a like experience when death had outwardly separated him from her to whom he addressed that noblest invocation ever written by a man in honor of a woman:

> O Lyric Love, half angel and half bird
> And all a wonder and a wild desire
> . . . . . .
> Never may I commence my song to God
> Who first taught song by gift of thee,
> Except with bent head and beseeching hand
> That still despite the distance and the dark,
> What was again may be, some interchange
> of grace,
> Some splendor once thy very thought,
> Some benediction anciently thy smile.[9]

[9] See "La Saisiaz" and the close of "Paracelsus."

XI

PROOF AGAINST PRACTICAL SKEPTICISM

Its power to protect us against the prevailing practical skepticism must be set down as a fourth spiritual value attaching to the philosophy of life we have outlined. This practical skepticism has taken on many a sinister form and given birth to shallow standards and loose relations in business and social life. By no means is it to be confused with that usage of the term which identifies it with irreligion and which a distinguished divine of New York City described as "the most dangerous characteristic of our time." But I, for one, must beg to take issue with this identification. One has only to recall the derivation of the word "skepticism" to appreciate what a mistaken notion the noted clergyman entertains. The word is derived from the

Greek *skeptomai,* which means, "I shade my eyes." The skeptic in religion is one who *shades* his eyes from prejudice, partiality, predilection, in order that he may look steadfastly, clearly and without bias at the object of his contemplation. Skepticism in the domain of religion has ever been a *sine quâ non* of progress.

Skepticism is the purgatory through which the thinker must needs pass on his way to the paradise of truth. Skepticism is the germ out of which the creed of the future will be evolved, because the creeds of to-day represent the satisfied doubts of past ages. Faith is strong only as it puts beliefs to the proof. Fear and laziness can accept them; it takes courage and consecration to question them. Reverting once again to "In Memoriam," we find, in the ninety-sixth canto those noble stanzas in which Tennyson dealt with the blessed ministry of doubt as manifested in the spiritual experience of his dearest friend:

He faced his doubts and gathered strength,
He would not make his judgment blind
He faced the spectres of the mind.
And laid them; *thus* he came at length
To find a stronger faith his own.

But now in glaring contrast to this noble skepticism that questions with open eyes there is a practical skepticism that questions with closed eyes and against which we need to be proof. It is the skepticism of Pontius Pilate who, when Jesus declared he came to "bear witness to the truth," replied sneeringly and without waiting for an answer, "What is truth?" It is the skepticism of the United States Senator who boldly and unblushingly said, "Ideals have nothing to do with politics; they have their rightful place in art, poetry, religion, but in politics they are irrelevant, immaterial and incompetent." It is the skepticism of the famous coal magnate who told the Industrial Relations Commission that "the Sermon on the Mount has no bearing upon big business," the implication being that Jesus, having had acquaintance with only

retail business, his precepts were not intended for wider application.

It is the skepticism of the college student who came to me with the query, "Suppose I do cheat, lie, gamble; suppose I am a bit loose in my relations with women; what difference can it make?" What is going to save these victims from the practical skepticism with which their moral nature has become diseased? What is going to save you and me from the danger of contagion? I answer, and without hesitation—Nothing but becoming firmly grounded in a philosophy of life that makes soul-development, as already defined, the master passion and sovereign aim of life, the most worth-while end to which all other ends shall be subservient.

XII

MODERN DISCOVERIES AND RELIGIOUS ANCHORAGE

WITHOUT professing to exhaust the totality of spiritual values, let me add to those already enumerated a fifth, one that is bound up with the marvelous discoveries that have so incalculably enriched the modern world, and at the same time undermined the foundations of much that we once believed. And here the spiritual value of our philosophy of life consists in its enabling us to face fearlessly the losses entailed because of the anchorage it supplies.

These discoveries have been such as to drive us into the intellectual arena, compelling us to fight for our faith and to decide whether there is still an enduring basis on which the superstructure of our conduct may rest. In the sciences of astronomy, biology, and com-

parative religion—to mention only three—discoveries have been made that have shocked us out of the faith of our childhood and forced us to readjust our thought to a new order of belief. Let me take an illustration from each one of these three to make my thought more clear. Prior to the modern era it was everywhere believed that our earth is the fixed center of the solar system, that all the celestial bodies were created for the sole purpose of benefiting the earth and man, that God placed the sun in the heavens to give man light by day, and the moon in order that he might have guidance by night. So long as these ideas were entertained, it was easy enough to believe that God's chief concern was man, and that his principal occupation was ministering to the welfare of man. But when it became discovered that our earth is a mere "suburb of the universe," that the sun is small compared to the vast bodies in the unbounded space beyond, that the solar system itself is merely "a fragment in an abyss of suns and worlds,"

that each of the multitude of stars is itself a sun with attendant planets and possibly inhabited by intelligent beings—when all these discoveries were brought to light, we recalled the words of the Hebrew psalmist and freighted them with a fuller content of meaning than was possible for him, "What is man that Thou art mindful of him?" Similarly in the field of biology it was formerly believed that man had been *specially* created, by divine fiat, six thousand years ago, and that all plants and animals below man were created solely for the benefit of man, the lord of creation. While such ideas as these were entertained, it was easy enough to believe that man was the most important object in the scheme of things. But when it became discovered that there has been an onflowing stream of creation from æons upon æons, an evolutionary creative process still unfinished, that the creatures below us have, at least in germ, every characteristic that marks our nature; when it was discovered that the perfect man—the man who harmo-

niously develops all the possibilities of his many-sided nature into a rounded life—belongs to the dim future, and never existed in any past—again we were made exceeding humble and forced to ask the question, "What can we dare to believe concerning the spirit of man and his destiny?"

Again, until quite recently it was believed by all Christians that the religion in which they happened to be reared is the only true, divine, universal religion, and that all other religions must therefore be gauged according as they agree or disagree with this perfect standard. But one day the science of comparative religion was born, and while still in its infancy it brought to light the truth that the old-time classification of religions into true and false, natural and revealed, human and divine, is obsolete. A hundred races means a hundred faiths, each with its own origin, history, ideals; hence the naïveté of thinking that the religion in which we happened to have been born is the one only true religion, and the

standard whereby the worth of all others is to be gauged. Now, in the face of these disquieting discoveries, we were forced to re-open questions we had long considered closed, we were forced to test once more the foundation upon which the superstructure of our conduct had been built. Is this universe "a fortuitous concourse of invisible atoms," or is there a great purpose behind the complex maze of things? Are we dust merely that returns to dust, or does the stamp of eternality rest upon our essential selfhood? Is our character determined by a combination of biological and sociological forces, or are we in truth free moral agents? Do heredity and environment decide how our moral nature is going to behave, or is our conduct under our own control? These are among the ultimate questions we have been compelled to re-open and re-answer, and relate to our philosophy of life as the solid substratum for the moral life.

XIII

NO FINAL PHILOSOPHY OF LIFE

From what has been said it is clear that there can be no final, finished philosophy of life valid for all time. Absolute truth is not for finite man. A finite being living in an infinite universe cannot hope ever to say the last word on any subject. And yet the one unpardonable sin of the intellect is to despair of itself, for there lies ever before it the task of acquiring more truth though it never attain all the truth. Agnosticism is a way station indeed, not a terminus. Well enough it was for George Eliot and Harriet Martineau to "accept the universe" and die in the belief that doors they found closed would never again be opened. But nevertheless all of them have since been re-opened and no one, we realize to-day, can close them forever. No lesson do we need to learn more fully than that the seem-

ingly final beliefs of our time are but passing adjustments to a universe vaster than all human views of it. To be sure, there is always an element of truth in the dominant ideas of one's time, but never do they represent *all* the truth. Fitting and serviceable it is that the ideas be formulated, but most essential it is that they be also "held fluid" as simply transient productions of the free and growing mind, certain to pass or to be fused with other ideas as the grasp of truth gains in firmness and inclusiveness.

> Our little systems have their day,
> They have their day and cease to be.

So wrote England's poet laureate some seventy years ago, and we have to note concerning his statement that it is just as natural and inevitable that these systems should cease to be as that they should have served their day. All the way from Plato to Professor Adler, each system represents simply "one man's adjustment to the sum of things." And

the value of each system for us is that it serves as a challenge to clarify our own thinking and to stimulate us in the effort to make our own readjustments as occasion may require. Future discoveries will undoubtedly necessitate new adjustments of thought and conduct, but surviving all changes I see two cardinal convictions, permanent pillars of a philosophy of life and crowned with such spiritual values as have here been enumerated. They concern the spiritual nature of man, its latent potentialities and its allegiance to what is infinite as the sole source of permanent satisfaction, be its attainment never so great. Let a further word on each of these imperishable realities be added.

XIV

THE CONTRIBUTION OF JESUS

The conviction that our moral nature possesses latent potentialities to which no limit can be set lies at the heart of the gospel of Jesus. Meaningless would have been his plea "be ye perfect" had he not held that every human soul is endowed with potential divine humanity. We meet the inspiring conviction first in the Sermon on the Mount. Like a golden thread it runs all through the discourse. To Jesus there was something sacred attaching to each human being because of the potentialities hidden there. And because of these he conceived of love in a fashion far removed from the conventional popular connotation of the term. According to Jesus, to love another is to act toward him as one who, no matter what the overt evil act he has committed, yet has hidden within him a potential divine humanity.

To love the good, the noble, the refined—that is easy enough; but to love the base, the boorish, the vulgar, ah, that is so difficult we call it divine. According to the earliest of the Gospels (Mark), the first man Jesus ever invited to his house was one Levi, a publican, a collector of taxes from Palestinian Jews for the Roman government. As such Levi was a member of the most despised caste in the community. Grouped with "sinners" are the "publicans" in the Gospel story, and together they constituted the lowest stratum of Jewish society in Jesus' day. Now this publican, when at Jesus' house, gave an account of himself, but so poor and forbidding was it that Jesus could not bring himself to believe it represented the total truth about the man. He must have hidden within the recesses of his moral nature something finer than what was revealed, and the story ends with the statement that Jesus found what he suspected was there, the germ, the ineradicable germ of a nobler manhood. Recall some of the other

personalities that came into Jesus' presence and had their hidden potentialities revealed to them. Peter, the sturdy fisherman, comes, and Jesus sees behind the impetuosity and instability of the man a capacity for loyalty and leadership. And this same Peter it was who subsequently became the head of the Messianic community at Jerusalem. Judas comes, with his kiss of betrayal, but deeper than his disloyalty was a remorse kindled in the man through memory of the benign influence of his Master. The woman of Samaria comes, and has revealed to her a conception of worship and spirituality to which the response was instantaneous because Jesus did but make explicit what the woman had the power to appreciate. The woman who was a "sinner" comes, and to her is revealed a virtue and a moral capacity which she imagined had gone out of her forever. One after another they come, out of the shadow into the penetrating ray of Jesus' personality, and lo, a transfiguring light is shed upon their insignificant lives.

XV

THE ETHICS OF JESUS AND THE ETHICAL MOVEMENT

This gospel of the moral nature of man with its latent potentialities for approximating the divine and the doctrine of love bound up with it, has its analogues in the central teaching of the Ethical movement. It makes common cause with the ethics of Jesus at this point more than at any other. In confirmation of this truth permit me to quote the following passage from the *magnum opus* of the founder of that movement:

> Seek and ye shall find. But what exactly is it that we are to seek? The spiritual nature. But what is the spiritual nature? The spiritual nature in another is the fair quality distinctive of that other raised toward the Nth degree. We are to paint ideal portraits of our spiritual associates. We are to see them in the light of what is better in them as it would be if it were transfigured into the best.

The power of ideally appreciating others, of seeing them in the light of their possible best and the feeling of love consequent on this vision is the mightiest lever for transforming evil into good, and for sweetening the embittered lives of men. Spiritual appreciation—in its supreme form it is the art of going down to the lowest of human beings and making them think well of themselves because of possibilities in their nature they themselves hardly surmise.[10]

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[10] *Op. cit.*, 231, 232.

XVI

THE NEVER-ENDING PURSUIT OF THE IDEAL

A WORD now concerning the second of the two permanent pillars of a philosophy of life with its implied spiritual values—the refusal of our moral nature ever *permanently* to be satisfied with anything short of the infinite.

To be satisfied with aught of progress we have achieved on the assumption that we can rise no higher, spells self-stultification.

It is said that when the Danish sculptor, Thorwaldsen, had completed a certain statue he exclaimed, "At last I have realized my ideal." Contrast with this the conviction of Macready who, after his hundredth impersonation of Hamlet, remarked, "Ah, this dear, dear Hamlet; the true artist never dwells fondly upon what he has achieved but is ever looking forward to an ideal still beyond his reach." A

discontent that is truly divine never ceases with any attainment however high. For the man whose ideal is ahead of his achievement there is always hope, even though that ideal be low; but for the man who has sunk his ideal to the level of his achievement there is no hope even though that achievement be high. Ever is there within us unused power and always something beyond the best we have done waiting for realization. Beyond the righteousness we know is that Righteousness "the hem of whose garment has never yet been touched, the plenitude of whose being has never yet been revealed, the radiance of whose glory has never yet been uncloaked; the Righteousness of whose ineffable light our highest visions are but feeble rays and yet, in whose service, even now, amid the contentions of the time, we can gain the precious boon of inward calm and peace." The ideal grows as we climb to it. The climbing path never ends because ever and anon new summits loom into view. And so at length we learn

that it is not the summit but the climbing, not achievement but growth, that is life. It is depressing, do you say, to realize that no human attainment is ever final, that each new milestone of progress marks only a kind of vantage ground from which we climb to some higher manifestation of power? Then let the cheering and inspiring fact be brought to mind that no statical heaven, however fine and finished, could ever *permanently* satisfy us. As a temporary resting place for tired souls such a heaven makes a powerful appeal indeed, but once rested and refreshed we would wish to resume the upward way. In our nobler moods at least, if not at other times, we repudiate the traditional idea of the end of life as "a good time coming" when achievement will cease and life be a dead lake instead of a living stream.

At Oberammergau, on the morning after the Passion Play, I climbed the Kofal, the mountain that rises behind the imposing theater. The road was steep, stony and tortuous. Here and there, at intervals of about

fifty yards, benches had been placed to break the continuity of the climb; and in front of each bench was a crude picture representing a scene from the closing days of the life of Jesus. In Roman Catholic countries these places on mountain slopes, where one finds such benches and pictures, are called "Stations of the Cross." Thus the traveler pauses as he climbs, and as he pauses there looks down upon him a great thought out of the life of the Nazarene. And so, rested and refreshed, he renews the climb until, at last, the final Station of the Cross is reached. Strip this incident of its sectarian implications and what remains is a fairly accurate account of what our life must ever be. We must keep climbing, and we must get tired, and we must have moments for rest, for self-collecting and self-examination, moments in which there can look down upon us the great conception of the infinitely perfect to which we tend.

(1)

THE END